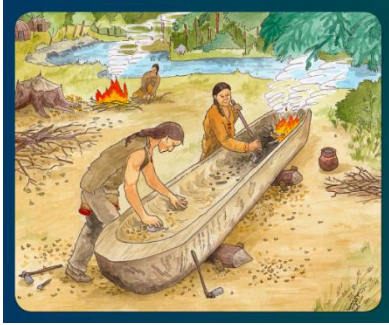


# 500 Generations of Continuity, Change and Adaptation



## A Witness to Ancient Maritime Traditions: A 500 Year-Old Dugout Canoe from Shelburne Pond

**Dugout canoes are an ancient form of watercraft used for thousands of years.**

Native Vermonters have likely been making dugout canoes since our first forests covered the land over 9,500 years ago. Most of the dugouts recovered in Vermont are made from white pine. The people used fire to burn and soften the log, then worked with ground stone adzes and scraping tools to carve out the dugout.

People used wooden paddles or oars to propel and steer the dugout. Dugout canoes transported people and goods on rivers and lakes. They also served as fishing boats and for trapping, duck hunting, and gathering wetland and shoreline plants. Based on archaeological evidence from various Maine coastal sites, Maine archaeologist Bruce Bourque hypothesizes that 4,000 plus years ago Maine's coastal people were fishing for swordfish from dugouts out in the open ocean.

This dugout, carved from white pine, is approximately 400 - 550 years old, dating from between 1481 A.D. – 1601 A.D. based on non-calibrated radiocarbon dates. The dugout was found in the fall of 1979 by a University of Vermont student who thought it was a floating board. Recovered in 1979, it is one of three dugouts discovered in Shelburne Pond, Vermont. The two holes in the canoe were drilled to collect wood samples for radiocarbon dating.

Ancient people across the planet made dugouts wherever the right wood was available. Dugouts in the United States have been dated to more than 6,000 years. Discovery of robust stone adzes and gouges in many Vermont archaeological sites suggest that dugouts were made in Vermont at least 6,000 years ago if not earlier. Remarkably, this ancient tradition was kept alive for hundreds of generations. In 1588, English colonist Thomas Hariot recorded stories about Virginia's Native people and their traditions and customs. His travelogue, illustrated by John White, inspired Dutch engraver (who never left Europe) to create some amazing prints about the Virginia Natives. He famously made a print of the Natives fabricating a dugout canoe ( see back page). Samuel de Champlain in 1613 observed Natives along the Massachusetts coast making dugouts. And most recently, an elderly Abenaki trapper in Addison County, Vermont, recorded via letter in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century how he constructed, as a young man, a dugout to trap muskrats in Shelburne Pond.

In 2000, a Florida high school teacher and his students discovered a cache of 101 complete or partial dugouts along a Florida lake. Using radiocarbon dating methods, they date from 500 to 5,000 years ago and in length ranged from 15 feet to 31 feet.

Painting by Gemma-Jayne Hudgell, Farmington, Maine.

## Additional resources to learn more:

[A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia: of the Commodities and of the Nature and Manners of the Natural Inhabitants.](#) Thomas Hariot. 1588. Chapter XII. The Manner of Making Their Boats.

<http://www.roanetnhistory.org/hariot-debry-virginia.php?loc=Hariot-DeBry-Briefe-True-Report-Virginia&lang=us&pgid=49>

[Carolina Work Boats Project. Native American Dugout Canoes of the Carolina Sounds.](#)

<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jmack/boats/canoes.htm>

[Hands-on History: The Pennsylvania Dugout Canoe Project.](#) In 2005, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission along with other groups and volunteers created a dugout canoe as an experiment in prehistoric technology. Read the [Pennsylvania Heritage](#) magazine article here. You can also [download a slideshow](#) (PDF, 12.7 MB).

[Indian Canoes of Eastern Carolina.](#)

<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jmack/boats/stick.htm>

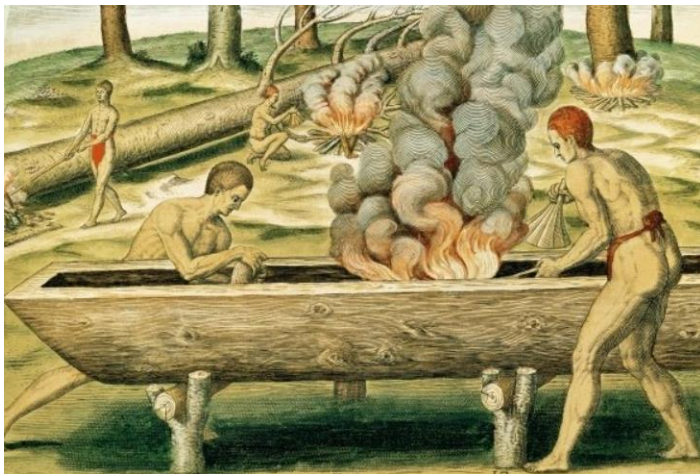
[Oral Traditions and the Archaeological Record of a Wabanaki Maritime Society](#) - How did Vermont's and America's Native communities get around on water? Brettan Leigh Deweese. Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations.

<http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1182&context=etd>

The Swordfish Hunters. The History and Ecology of an Ancient American Sea People. Bruce Bourque. 2012. Bunker Hill Publishing.

[A Vessel of Indian Culture.](#) Stuart Ferguson. August 3, 2011. The World Street Journal.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703296604576005593351847536>



One of Theodore De Bry's remarkable engravings of Native people in late 16<sup>th</sup> century Virginia. University of North Carolina Digital Collections.

<http://www2.lib.unc.edu/dc/debry/about.html>

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